Stepped-Up Bombing Is Decried in Senate

By Spencer Rich
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Angry reaction erupted on Capitol Hill yesterday to stepped-up U.S. bombing in Cambodia, with Sen. Walter F. Mondale (D-Minn.) denouncing it as "a double-cross of the Congress" by President Nixon that "blatantly violated the compromise agreed upon by the Congress and the President which ends all bombing in Indochina by Aug. 15."

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee, for its part, demanded a Pentagon explanation of the increased bombing over the past few days and asked for details of daily sortie rates.

Citing a statement by Republican leader Hugh Scott (Pa.) on the Senate floor Friday, Mondale said the Aug. 15 compromise—allowing the President to continue bombing until then, but requiring him to seek congressional permission for any combat activities in Indochina after that—had included a White House pledge that it wouldn't escalate the bombing in the meantime.

"In only three days, however, it became apparent that the administration had no intention of keeping its word," Mondale said. "It is now clear that at the very time the President was agreeing to the compromise, the Pentagon was already planning a 50 per cent increase in its bombing sorties over Cambodia."

Pentagon spokesman William Beecher disclosed Monday that, in response to increased ground fighting and with the weather more favorable, daily sorties in Cambodia by U.S. fighter-bombers had been escalated to "somewhere in the 200s." Since the number of these sorties had previously fallen to about 150 a day, this would mean an escalation of as much as 50 per cent.

Beecher pointed out yesterday, however, that his Monday statement had placed the start of the escalation at mid-week last week—several days prior to the congressional compromise with the White House.

Beecher said B-52 bombing activity hadn't escalated.

The same point as to the dates was emphasized by an aide to Scott, who said the compromise was meant to cover the situation as it existed on Friday, whereas the reported escalation had begun earlier in the week.

Assurances against bombing escalation were given to Scott—and by Scott to the Foreign Relations Committee—on Friday. Prior to the Senate vote on the compromise provision, Scott's top aide called congressional liaison chief William Timmons and asked for guidance on the matter, it was learned yesterday.

Timmons, in turn, called the San Clemente White House and an aide to national security assistant Henry A. Kissinger then called Scott's office back with the assurances. The Kissinger aide went over word-for-word with Scott's aide a proposed statement outlining the assurances, which was then delivered by Fulbright on the floor. It read:

"The (foreign relations) committee offers this (Aug. 15 bombing cutoff compromise) amendment assuming that the interval between now and Aug. 15 will not be the occasion for an escalation of U.S. bombing in Cambodia or for its resumption anywhere else in Indochina unless provoked. As expressed by one member, the committee's view on this matter is that 'under this authority all efforts should be made consistent with the limited military objectives involved, to minimize damage to civilian life and property.' The committee's expectation in this matter has been communicated to the White House and assurances have been received in return that these guidelines are acceptable."

A minute later, Scott took the floor to confirm this, saying, "I have undertaken, as the distinguished chairman has noted, to secure assurances that there would be no escalation in the bombing during this intervening period, that great care would be taken to avoid damage to civilian persons and property. That point was raised by several members. We have received that assurance from the White House. I have revealed to the committee the persons with whom I have discussed it."